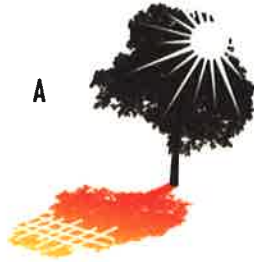


A L A M O S A C O U N T Y



December 27, 2017

Attn: Dan Dallas, Forest Supervisor
Rio Grande National Forest
1803 West Highway 160
Monte Vista, CO 81144

Re: Rio Grande National Forest Draft Forest Plan Comments

Dear Mr. Dallas:

On behalf of the Alamosa County Board of Commissioners, we would like to extend our support of Alternative B in the Rio Grande National Forest Plan Revision. After attending two years of public meetings and communicating with USFS employees, we understand the plan is a thoughtful balance of protecting one of the San Luis Valley's most precious resources, our national forest, while encouraging its utilization in an economically challenged region.

Alamosa County identifies with the three overarching goals of the revised plan. As an agricultural community, we value Goal 1: to "protect and restore watershed health, water resources, aquatic ecosystems, and the systems that rely on them". The Rio Grande is the lifeblood of Alamosa County and the San Luis Valley and the protection and restoration of our watersheds is of vital importance to maintaining our way of life.

We believe Goal 2: to "maintain and restore sustainable, resilient terrestrial ecosystems" represents a more adaptive way to manage the forest in response to new challenges including forest fires like the West Fork Complex of 2013 and the pervasive bark beetle kill dominating our mountain landscape.

Alamosa County values Goal 3: to "actively contribute to social economic sustainability in the broader landscape and connect citizens to the land". According to the San Luis Valley Development Resources Group's 2013 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan, tourism contributes \$16,853,000 to Alamosa County's economy and employs 11.9% of our population. We believe tourism and outdoor recreation is a growing driver in our local economy and we have worked with regional groups such as San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLVGO) and state and federal partners towards increasing the visibility of the outdoor recreation offerings of the San Luis Valley. Promoting and investing in quality recreation access while maintaining and improving the dynamic landscapes and natural systems that make our forest so singular is of significant importance to economic development in this region.

Although Alamosa County has a relatively small amount of National Forest land compared to our neighboring counties, approximately 21,142 acres, we are proud to include a portion of the 14,351' Mount Blanca within our boundaries. Although we support protection and understand the spiritual significance of this mountain to several American Indian Tribes, we would caution against any action that would bar public access on USFS land, including closing any portion of Lake Como Road or reduction in any mechanized access that already exists.

Other standards and objectives of Plan B that resonate with Alamosa County include, but are not limited to, the following:

- OBJ NNIS 1: to reduce terrestrial species on 300 acres is valuable to Alamosa County's ability to reduce and control noxious weeds as mandated by the State of Colorado.
- OBJ VEG 3-5: to increase commercial harvest of beetle kill damaged timber during the crucial period of viability aids in our need for employment opportunities and strengthens the local economy.
- MA VEG 9 & 10: to balance sustainable forestry with economic development and allows innovation in forest product offerings allows development opportunities to be evaluated on individual merit and promotes economic diversification in the San Luis Valley.
- DC CDT 1-11: to manage Congressionally Designated Trails including the Old Spanish National Historic Trail and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. These famous trails are major attractions to our region and we believe should be protected and developed to ensure use for future generations.
- MA CRT 9: to engage local communities in local heritage tourism activities which is another major draw to our region and is a concept being incorporated in many local planning documents.
- OBJ FIRE 1-2: Fire management adjacent to the built landscape and fuels reduction is always a proactive approach and interfaces with local communities in fire-wise planning.
- DC REC 1-5: Recreation management and design which promotes and protects the wealth of the outdoor recreation assets in the Rio Grande National Forest.
- MA REC 6: Trail design to tie-in with local master plans is a responsive approach to community planning and acknowledges the work being done in local trail design.

Alamosa County believes Alternative B is the best compromise between the other alternatives. Alternatives C and D are less moderate in their approach while Alternative B addresses a balance of uses as well as long-term environmental sustainability and protection. We believe Alternative B is the best representation of the uses of our forest and the strata of our local demographic. We applaud the USFS for their planning process and appreciate the opportunity to participate in and comment on this new approach to national forest planning.

Sincerely,



Darius Allen
Chairman
Alamosa County Commissioner
(Signed by Gigi Dennis, County Administrator)